PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS’ DEPARTMENT

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PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY AND WORLD WAR II

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Teachers of Pennsylvania history have an excellent opportunity to motivate their course by emphasizing its current phase. Students today have a personal interest in the present war. By showing them that this is part of Pennsylvania history, the teacher will help them to realize that history is alive and vital, not dead and dry. Pointing out Pennsylvania’s contributions will also remind them that our state can be proud of its present as well as its past.

One contribution which can be stressed is the quality and quantity of Pennsylvania’s military manpower. On a relative basis Pennsylvania ranks second only to New York in the number of men and women it has sent into the armed forces, and has furnished more soldiers than seventeen other states put together. More than six hundred thousand Pennsylvanians are serving in the Army, enough soldiers for three of our peacetime armies. The Navy has nearly 250,000 men and women from Pennsylvania, enough to man the entire fleet four years ago. Taking into consideration those who are no longer in service, about one million persons from our state have worn their country’s uniform since the beginning of the defense period, or one out of every ten.

In high-ranking officers Pennsylvania has far more than its share. The Chief of Staff, commanding the largest army this country has ever had, was born in Uniontown, while the head of the Army Air Force is a native of Gladwyne. Marshall and Arnold give Pennsylvania two of the nation’s four five-star generals. Of the seventeen full admirals in the Navy, as listed in the 1945 World Almanac, three are Pennsylvanians, as are seven of the forty-one vice-admirals. Seven of the Army’s thirty-nine lieutenant
generals are from this state. Altogether Pennsylvania has one hundred generals and twenty-eight admirals.

Another contribution worthy of study is the military and naval installations inside Pennsylvania. While the Army has concentrated its training in the warmer climate of the South, Pennsylvania has two large camps, Indiantown Gap and Camp Reynolds, and two general hospitals, Deshon, at Butler, and Valley Forge, at Phoenixville. Other installations have included the Tobyhanna Military Reservation, the Army's Medical Field Service School at Carlisle, the Army Air Force Intelligence School at Harrisburg, the New Cumberland Reception Center, the Naval Air Training Station at Willow Grove, and the Navy's photographic reconnaissance school at Harrisburg. There are a dozen military depots of various kinds, such as the Philadelphia Navy Yard, the Mechanicsburg Supply Depot, the Middletown Air Depot, the Letterkenny Ordnance Depot, Frankford Arsenal, and the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot. Besides these, there are more than a dozen minor installations, some of them still secret.

Pennsylvania's industrial might has also played an important part in the present world conflict. It ranks sixth in total war production, fifth in shipbuilding, and fourth in ordnance. Its actual contribution has been even higher, since it produces almost one-third of the nation's steel and the same proportion of coal. More money has been spent to expand production capacity in Pennsylvania since the beginning of the defense period than in any other state. Three hundred Pennsylvania firms have been honored with production awards.

Financial contributions have also been significant. Pennsylvanians are paying federal taxes at the rate of two billion dollars a year, twice as much as the entire nation paid thirty years ago. The six War Loans have raised six billion dollars, while the people of our state have given twenty-five million dollars to war relief. They have likewise given freely of their time to such war activities as Civilian Defense, the Red Cross, the Civil Air Patrol, the Coast Guard Temporary Reserve, and the State Guard.

This brief summary suggests a number of topics which the Pennsylvania history class might find interesting. The teacher can find reference material in Pennsylvania's First Year at War, a few copies of which are still available from the Pennsylvania
Historical Commission, if the school library does not have one. *Pennsylvania's Second Year at War* should also be ready for distribution by the time the fall term opens.

Emphasis, however, should be placed on local contributions. Students will be more interested in a private from their home town than in a five-star general from the other end of the state. In some communities libraries and historical societies have been maintaining clipping files on their own district at the suggestion of the Commission. Schools in such localities will find these invaluable for reference. The Commission will be glad to furnish the name of the collecting agency in your district, if any, on request.

Even without the aid of any local war record depository, much information can be garnered. Every issue of your local paper will contain some war news about your community as long as hostilities continue, and it may be possible to locate back numbers somewhere.

The field for projects is unlimited. Some of them would be of permanent value, worthy of preserving in the local library or historical society. Examples can be taken from any field. If your community is small, your class could collect the names of all local servicemen. Should the names already be on the local honor roll, committees could compile brief biographies of each man. Records of the place and date of birth, parents, and similar facts would actually be valuable in the future. Should your town be too large for such an enterprise, lists could be made of high-ranking officers or medal-winners. Your students would probably find such a task interesting, and they would incidentally get some training in historical research.

More ambitious programs may be feasible, even with ninth grade students. If you have an important military installation near you, a committee can be appointed to report to the class about it. An outline for the report might be prepared by the teacher, something like this:

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I. Date established
II. Use before present war
III. Functions
IV. Number of local people employed there.
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Information of this nature could probably be obtained from employees in the committee's acquaintance. Even if the persons asked
did not have the answers to the questions, their curiosity would probably be sufficiently aroused for them to find out. In some cases it might be possible to get a copy of the post history or even to arrange for a class visit.

Other committees could study the community's record in war production. Large corporations will furnish posters, advertisements, pamphlets, and similar material. Officials of smaller plants will usually be willing to talk to your representatives; employees can often furnish as much information as you will need. The operations of the volunteer war agencies offer another field of study. In the case of such well-known organizations as Selective Service and the OPA, the class might begin by discussing what it already knows. Then members could be appointed to find out the answers to questions the class does not know. In the end, with the aid of the teacher, a complete account could be prepared by the class. Perhaps you might be able to persuade representatives of other organizations, such as the State Guard, to appear before your students and tell them something about their work.

These are a few illustrations of ways in which Pennsylvania history can be made a part of your students' lives. Other possibilities will readily occur to any teacher. No school would want to try all of them, if for no other reason than to avoid becoming a public nuisance. The program must be adapted to the abilities of the class and the available sources of information. No class can be so poor, however, nor any community so insignificant that its students cannot study its war history. In fact, in the reports they prepare they will be writing its war history.

**USING LOCAL RESOURCES FOR THE COURSE IN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY**

*By Edwin B. Yeich*

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When Pennsylvania history was added to our curriculum, we decided to see what the effect would be of bringing into the study whatever we could find of local importance which would contribute to the larger pattern. Our first step was to list those places in Berks County about which the children had at least heard, possibly had visited, and which had been considered of
enough importance to be selected as state or national shrines. As it happens, the county has three of these: (1) the home of Pennsylvania's great Indian Commissioner and Interpreter, Conrad Weiser; (2) the birthplace of Daniel Boone, famous Indian fighter and explorer; and (3) the site of one of the nation's early iron-processing establishments, Hopewell Furnace. To these was added a large list of places of local historical interest, as designated by the Historical Society of Berks County and by other organizations. We then tried to determine just why each of these sites had been selected as worthy of recognition and whether its contributions to history were of any importance in the study of state history. This required some reading in order not only to get the story of the place, but also to determine how that fitted into the history of the state. As this reading progressed, additional topics of interest were collected. For instance, the home of Conrad Weiser led to the study of his work, revealing how influential he was in the affairs of the Indians and how important Pennsylvania was in the overall picture of the French and Indian War, through his influence. The Boone Homestead, too, contributed the story of its famous son, and another phase of the Indian situation in the early days. Of course, a great many of the places listed were of more or less local interest, but there still remained a great deal of material which could be used for the purposes we intended.

Another source of material was tapped when an attempt was made to determine just why some of the local organizations bore the names they did. Two may be considered typical, the General David McMurtrie Gregg Post of the American Legion, and the Lieutenant General Hunter Liggett Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Each of these names brought into focus a person, whether native or resident, who had contributed in some way to the history of the state or the nation. These references were not confined, however, to organizations of veterans, but included social and fraternal organizations. Some, too, although they did not point to a son of Berks County, bore the name of a person whose contribution to history was such as to merit having his name memorialized, and when he appeared in the story reference could be made to the fact that this or that organization was named in his memory. There too were some organizations which in themselves contributed to history, notably the National Guard Com-
panies of the county, whose origins and achievements provided interesting material for the military history of the community. Finally, the monuments erected in the parks of Reading and other places were considered worthy of study.

After the information was collected and organized, it was possible to point out places within the range of the pupils' knowledge which were either the source of a particular event, or had contributed to some movement of statewide importance. As the study progressed the interest of the pupils began to grow and soon they too were contributing to the total, by searching for some of the material themselves, and by bringing in stories and legends which they had heard from their parents and elders. Although the latter were good sources of interesting and valuable information, their stories had to be carefully checked for authenticity. They also began to bring in cherished heirlooms, and other antiques of historical interest which were appropriately displayed. The presence of these objects opened the way for a discussion of life, customs and manufacturing processes in early Pennsylvania. Here again should be mentioned the valuable museum material arranged for school loan and exhibit by the Historical Society of Berks County, which was a source of interest and information to the children.

One problem which developed at the beginning was that of determining the best time for discussing the historical data after it had been collected. Two solutions were suggested: (1) use the local material as an introduction and as a foundation upon which to build a larger state movement; and (2) teach the period of state history and then refer to the local angle, possibly with the question: "Just what happened here at this time?" Actual trial of each of these two types of presentation soon taught us that both had their merits, and that a combination of the two, as far as the whole course was concerned, worked best. For instance, when the founding and development of the colony was under consideration, it was followed with the questions: "When and why was the county erected? What happened between the founding of the colony and the erection of the county?" and others of like import. On the other hand, since the entire project of the Union Canal more or less depended upon certain geographical features of Berks County for its inception and development, it was found best to deal with the local information first, and then to add to it, to complete the era as far as the state is concerned.
The presentation of the material varied, also, according to the circumstances. In some cases the children themselves reported to the class on events and personages. In others talks were given to the classes by local residents on topics of local or state history with which they were familiar. Thus, veterans were able to make clear the contributions of their units in some of the nation's crises, while men familiar with early manufacture or trade could describe these elements in the life of the people. Maps were prepared showing the most important places referred to by visiting speakers and brought out through class discussion. An annual tour of places of historical interest is planned for the future when conditions will permit. In the meantime instructor and pupils are attempting to make as realistic as possible through classroom activities the study of places located on the map. This has been sufficient for a great many of the children since they have a wide knowledge of towns in the county.

SALT AND THE EARLY SETTLERS

By A. P. Akeley
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The first hardy pioneers who pushed their way over the mountains into western Pennsylvania were a long way from the places where the bare necessities of life could be purchased. The few accounts we have of the early settlement of Potter County all tell of the bitter struggles experienced to secure sufficient food and clothing to sustain life. Jersey Shore was the nearest trading point and the nearest place where grain could be ground. It was seventy or eighty miles away. Sixty miles of the road was without a house and during the first few years was but a trail for pack horses. A livelihood consisted almost exclusively of what could be raised on the small patches of cleared land and what could be taken from the forests. It was a life that developed resourcefulness. Whatever was necessary was made at home if possible, and the nearest source of supply was the one patronized.

One of the absolute necessities, and one that could not be made or found near the average home, was salt. The wilderness could furnish a living of sorts, if there were salt to season the meat and preserve the hides of animals killed. Hunters and Indian
scouts often went into the forest on extended trips with no food except a small bag of corn meal and a smaller one of salt. These were not expeditions of pleasure; but necessity can often drive a man to do tasks he would never undertake of his own volition.

Salt was scarce throughout all of western Pennsylvania, so that salt springs were highly prized by the early settlers. From these salt springs it was sometimes necessary to boil eight hundred gallons of water to obtain one bushel of salt. When purchased, its price was from $3.50 upwards per bushel, so it was used sparingly, and spilling it was really a misfortune. At first salt was imported into the western settlements over the mountains from Philadelphia, which was a long haul, and always the supply was limited. So important was the supply of this commodity that any improvement in the means of getting it to the consumers or any decrease in the price was a matter of news. On August 20, 1796, the Pittsburgh Gazette announced: "We have it from undoubted authority that Salt, by way of the Lakes, can be supplied at Pittsburgh for two dollars a bushel; that a gentleman of known enterprise is making such arrangements as will enable him to keep up a supply of that necessary article, adequate to the demand of this country." The gentleman referred to was James O'Hara, of western Pennsylvania fame, but it is uncertain how soon he began operation. The fact that salt was selling in Pittsburgh in 1799 for $3.50 per bushel would indicate that some was being brought in by way of Lake Erie from the Onondaga region. Early in the nineteenth century, however, salt was being produced at the Kanawha licks of western Virginia, and in 1813 salt began to be produced commercially on the Conemaugh near the present site of Saltsburg.

An article appearing in the Potter County Journal of February 1, 1865, stated that oil and salt wells were being sunk in Bradford, Tioga, Potter, and Cameron Counties, and that the people in this district were running wild in land speculation particularly in the headwaters of the Sinnemahoning where many oil and salt wells were being drilled. "These wells," said the article, "show evidence of strong salt beds, that the water pouring from one of these wells is producing more than one pound of salt to the gallon. Enough salt water is already discovered and tested to know that Pennsylvania is now independent of the Syracuse monopoly and will soon produce more than it consumes."
To the early settlers of Potter County the nearest natural source of salt was the salt spring at what now is Gardeau in the southeastern corner of McKean County. Early maps show Gardeau as Great Elk lick, so named by the Indians because of the salty nature of the water which flowed from the ground in great quantities and which attracted the deer and the elk in great numbers.

The story is told that in the year 1800 a seaman known as Captain Thomas, a former native of New Jersey, was forced to abandon his sloop by a Spanish man-of-war off the coast of Florida. It seems to be a fact that Thomas was a sea pirate, and the Spanish war vessel was after him because he had captured and sunk a vessel laden with silver bullion. Thomas, it seems, made his escape in a small boat and followed the coast from Florida to the Chesapeake Bay. Here he entered the Susquehanna River and made his way up this stream as far as Sunbury. From that point he journeyed up the West Branch to the mouth of the Sinnemahoning and then up that stream until he reached the Great Elk Lick. Why he travelled all this distance to escape the vengeance of the Spanish authorities, why he took this route, or why he stopped where he did is not known. It is possible, however, that having lived in New Jersey, he had heard of the wonderful opportunities offered in the Ohio country and decided to join the great emigration. At any rate, he settled at Great Elk Lick, built himself a log cabin, noted because of the large size of its stone chimney, and began to manufacture salt.

Years before the first settlers came to Potter County, the Great Elk Lick was known to travellers passing over the portage from the head of navigation on the Sinnemahoning to the Canoe Place on the Allegheny. Probably the Indians had used salt from this Great Elk Lick for centuries prior to the coming of the first white man, because it was on one of the main lines of Indian travel north and south. At the time Captain Thomas settled here this route was much used by emigrants from the Atlantic seaboard to western Pennsylvania and the Ohio country.

As an illustration of the importance of this particular route at this time, it is only necessary to relate that as early as 1789 representatives from the northwestern and other parts of Pennsylvania met at Harrisburg for what, to all intents and purposes, was a “good roads meeting.” In those early days the water ways
were the best lines of travel through the pathless forests of north-western Pennsylvania. Consequently, at this meeting the possibilities of connecting the Sinnemahoning and the Allegheny with a canal were discussed, and the idea found favor with the administrators of the state government. The next summer a party of surveyors was sent out to explore. They returned in due time with the report that the project was feasible; it could be done and would furnish a short and easy route to the West country and the Lakes. These surveyors were Maclay, Adlum, and Mattock, and their report is a matter of record.

It is probable, therefore, that Captain Thomas had a goodly number of customers for his salt with the early settlers of McKean and Potter Counties, in addition to a more or less steady stream of emigrants, packing over the portage past his place of business, to reach the Allegheny at what is now Port Allegany.

It is not known how long the former sea-faring Captain Thomas continued to manufacture salt at the Great Elk Lick, nor what eventually became of him. The next owner of the Salt Works seems to have been Noah Parker, who came in 1838, so it appears probable that the early settlers of Potter County had to obtain their salt by dealing with the one-time sea pirate, Captain Thomas.